

Hag Sameach,

As a 17 year-old, I am still finding my identity, both Jewish and secular, I am still figuring out what I want to do with my life and how I want to live that life. But I am afraid. I am afraid to start my independent life, a family, and a career in a world filled with so much injustice, and so much hate.

Today, I am praying for an end to hunger and poverty, an end to war, and an end to THE cruelty, hatred, and violence that pervade our society. That's not too much to ask, right?

Although I am still a teenager, I am not naive. I realize that my prayer for a world without hate, fear, violence and inequality - a prayer that people have dreamt of for millenia- will not come

easily.

But we can make my prayer - my dream - a reality. Not all at once, but gradually, through the use of one thing -

Understanding. Not an understanding of a concept or issue but a truly empathetic understanding of the affect that those issues have on humanity.

If instead of fighting, waging war, arguing, and standing by while others suffer we sought to understand, to comprehend, and to engage in dialogue, all of these problems would be alleviated, improved, and vanquished.

We cannot instantaneously come to understand why someone

hates us, or how it feels to be a victim of war or starvation, but we can try. We can try to learn about these issues and to connect with people. Once we have a basic understanding, that understanding will do nothing but grow.

I know that these are huge issues that are daunting to take on. So I and we need to start small. We need to start with our personal relationships. Instead of reaching for annoyance, for a sassy comeback, or for an insult, try to empathize. I know from experience that not only did I feel good about how I handled the situation, but that the tension lifted and the argument disappeared.

I pray that when we are faced – when I am faced – with hate or evil – whether we are the perpetrators, the victims, or just

bystanders – that we reach not for our bad inclination, our  
Yetzer Rah, but for understanding – real understanding.

Shanah Tovah